

The
WHITE PINE
SERIES OF
Architectural Monographs
Volume VI *Number 6*

ESSEX
A Connecticut
River Town

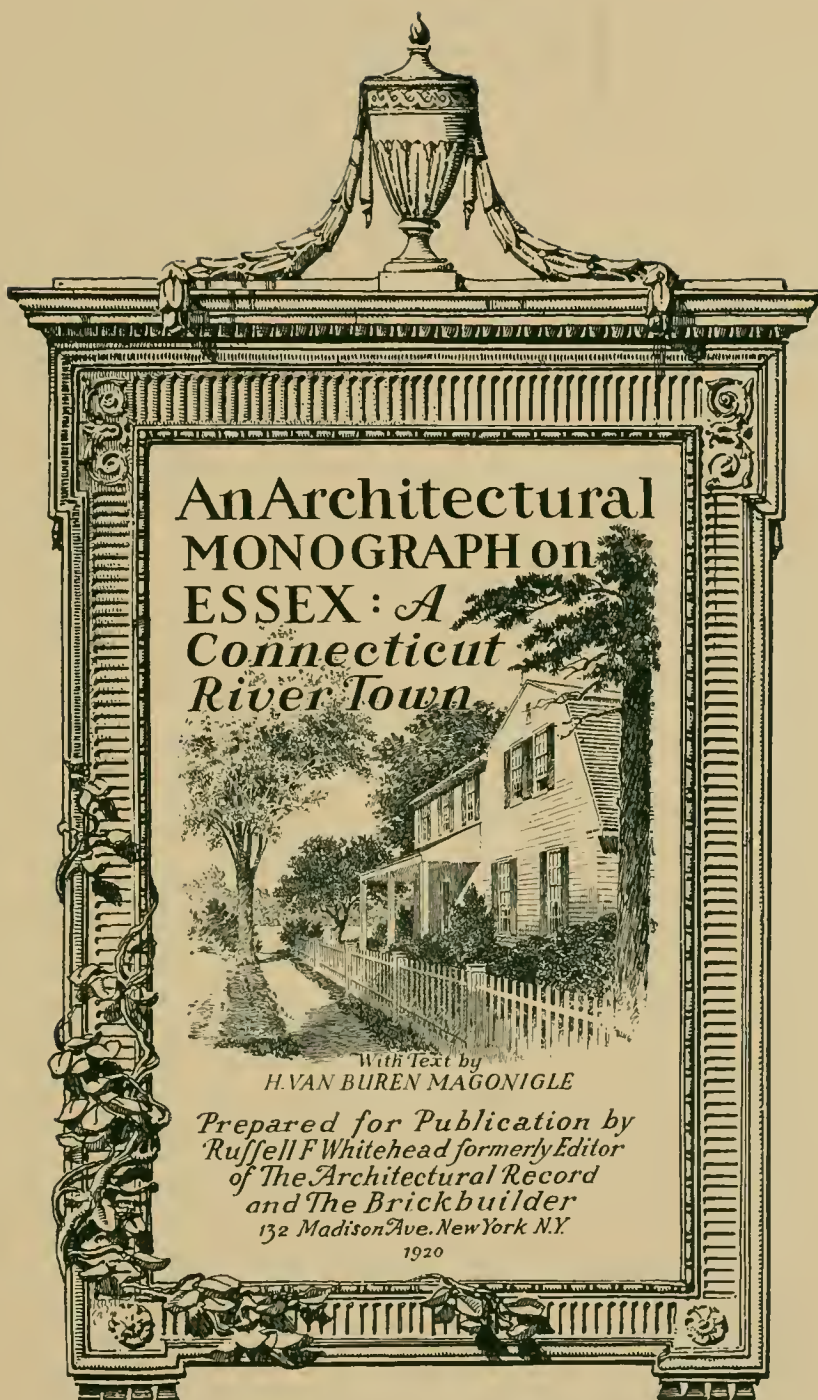
With Introductory Text by
H. Van Buren Magonigle

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An Architectural
MONOGRAPH on
ESSEX: *A*
Connecticut
River Town

With Text by
H. VAN BUREN MAGONIGLE

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and *The Brickbuilder*
132 Madison Ave. New York N.Y.

1920



OLD HOUSE AT RIVER END OF LITTLE POINT STREET, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.

THE WHITE PINE SERIES OF ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION SUGGESTING THE
ARCHITECTURAL USES OF WHITE PINE AND ITS
AVAILABILITY TODAY AS A STRUCTURAL WOOD

Vol. VI

DECEMBER, 1920

No. 6

ESSEX A CONNECTICUT RIVER TOWN

By H. VAN BUREN MAGONIGLE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNETH CLARK

"I remember the black wharves and the slips
And the sea tides tossing free;
And the Spanish sailors with bearded lips.
And the beauty and mystery of the ships
And the magic of the sea."

THERE are no black wharves now if ever there were, nor slips, and the sea tides barely reach it; the last Spanish whiskerado who swaggered through her streets has long since been gathered, beard and all, to his fathers—but as by the perfume of a memory Essex is haunted still by "the beauty and mystery of the ships and the magic of the sea." Dreaming by the river, the drone of the motors on the State highway further back does not disturb her peace. Her dreams are of that earlier day when the first Lays and Haydens came to Potapaug Point and Uriah Hayden built the old Ship Tavern just where the road which is now Essex Main Street came down to the river and the ferry to Ely's Landing on the easterly bank, nearly opposite. It is said that in Massachusetts the county of Suffolk lies north of Norfolk county; this seems so much too good to be true that I never investigated the

authenticity of the report. It is for the same reason that I decline to inquire why Essex is on the west bank of the river. There was a busy intercourse between the two banks, for in the old days the ferry at Old Lyme and the Essex-Ely's Landing Ferry seem to have been the only regular means of crossing the river between its lower reaches and Hartford. There is a legend that Daniel Webster, on his way from Boston to Washington, reaching the river after the ice had stopped the ferry service and before it was strong enough to bear the weight of a travelling coach,

spent several days on the easterly bank in the hope of a freeze and finally had to drive up to Hartford and cross there—a tale which throws interesting light upon the leisurely pace and delightful inconvenience of travel in the youth of this Republic.

It was on Potapaug or Big Point that the old shipyards were (they were burnt by the British in



THE VILLAGE SMITHY, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.

1812)—on the north side of Essex Main Street. The Lays seem to have been the first owners of the whole point and the Haydens to have bought from them the land on the southerly side. But Haydens and Pratts and Lays intermarried as people will and it is difficult now and quite unprofitable for a stranger to attempt to unravel the rival claims to priority and prestige which the inquiries in even a few hours' sojourn stir up. These Lays and Haydens were all shipbuilders and shipmasters; as a measure of the town's traditions, out of eight male Haydens in one family seven were sea captains. In those days the two bridges down at Old Lyme were not dreamed of—

now they seem to be a barrier between Essex and that sea with which she had then so close a tie



THE JOHN PRATT HOUSE, MAIN STREET,
ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.

and of which the river mouth was a gateway, the Sound but a vestibule. Not a vestige remains of the old yards where they built the tall clipper ships for the China trade and vessels of lesser tonnage for coastwise traffic; but on a quiet autumn day one has but to close one's eyes to hear the ring of the mallets and to smell the oakum and the tar that stopped the seams of those gallant craft—ships which linked a little village in Connecticut to the Flowery Kingdom and all the fragrant East. It is a haven now for the old cup-defender *Dauntless*, and it was on a quest for her that we made a detour from the high road and first found Essex. Moving swiftly through the streets I re-

ceived an impression of many curved roofs covering low, snug houses, and I was prepared to



THE LONG YELLOW HOUSE ON WEST AVENUE, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



THE OLD SHIP TAVERN, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT. Side Elevation.



THE OLD SHIP TAVERN, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT. From the River Side.

account for them by Dutch influence. But not a Dutchman nor a Dutch name was to be found on a second visit, only good old British names like the Lays, the Haydens, the Pratts, the Lewises, Starkeys and Hinghams. Nor could I find more than three curved roofs in the entire town; but for these it is easy to account—one at least was built by a ship-builder, another by a sea captain of a type more sensitive to influences than the rest and who wished to recall ashore the sweep of line of his home afloat. At all events I am prepared to maintain that in an atmosphere of New England primness these sweeping roof lines are as refreshing as a breath of the sea—a primness which must have been somewhat mitigated at times if we may trust the mute witness of a bill of sale to Molly Lay, hung up in the old Ship Tavern, and of which the chief items are rum and gin.

The old Hayden Homestead, the third house up from the river on Essex Main Street, has a hip roof, unusual among its gabled neighbors. It seems that up the river at Windsor "they knew how to make such roofs," and there was a carpenter of parts who knew the secrets of cutting rafter bevels and such, and instead of travelling about to do the work stayed comfortably at home and shipped the shaped lumber. The roof framing, at least, of this house and possibly the whole frame, was rafted down the river

and one other roof in the village is reputed to have made a similar voyage. There is every evidence of a quiet prosperity in the character of the exterior detail of many of the houses, although, except in the Tavern, the interiors are quite without interest; not even first-rate chimney-pieces survive. And the town as a whole has suffered from the Greek revival—a Greek with a particularly heavy hand appears to have been resuscitated.

Coming up the river or along the State highway between Saybrook and Hartford, you may see Essex—the new Essex—climbing her hill among the trees. And dwellers in the old Essex and the new climb of a Sunday to the four churches whose spires and towers of the most fearful and wonderful design prick through the leafy screen, ugly but picturesque. Around these churches, set quite close together in a neighborly way, quite in contrast with the usual superior airs of withdrawal and isolation churches of differing tenets seem to give themselves, are inter-

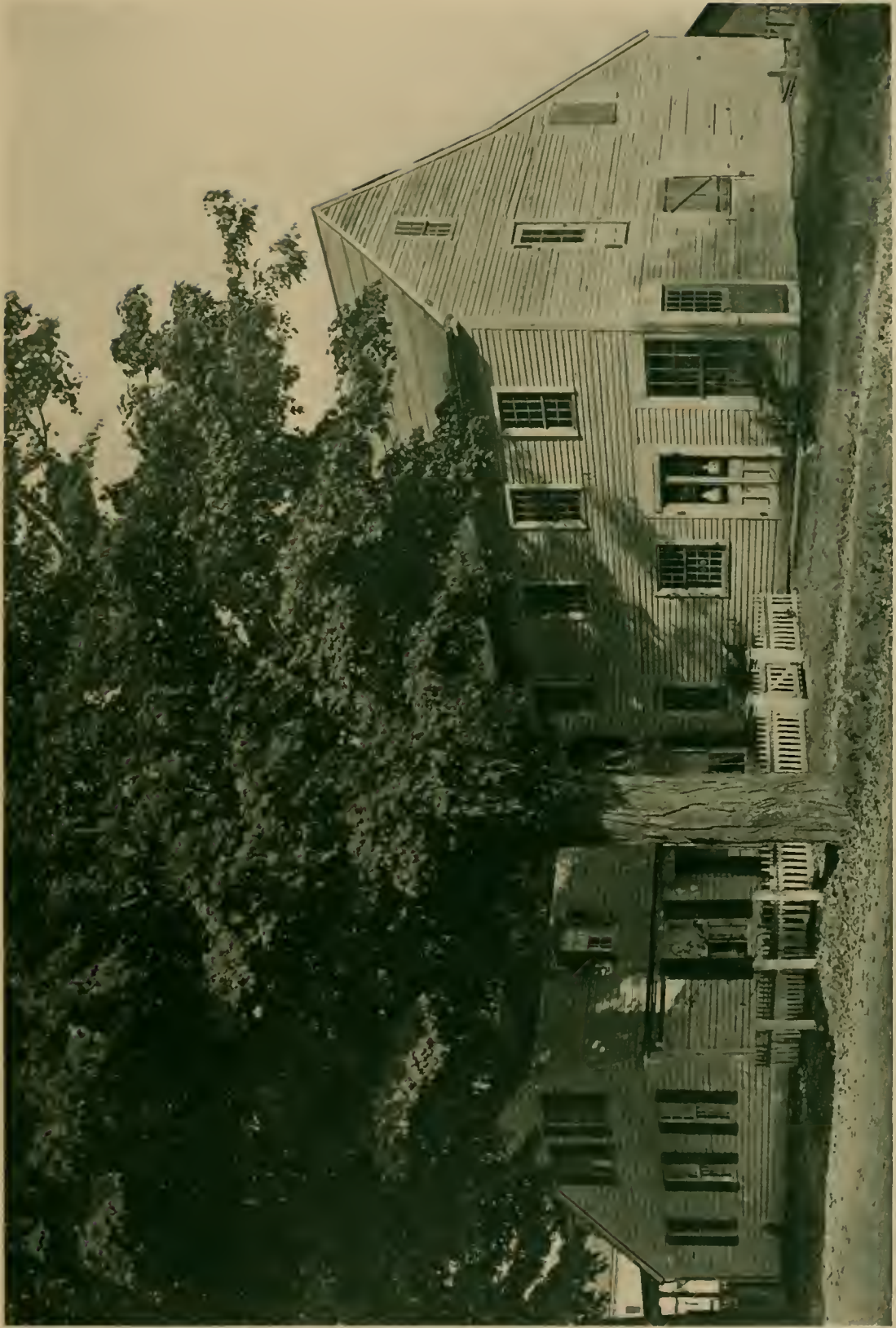


ENTRANCE PORCH OF PARKER HOMESTEAD,
ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.

esting arrangements of shady levels and of roads ramping up and roads ramping down, altogether distinctive in the atmosphere they create. From this upper level, West Avenue leads over and down to the State road. "Avenue" has a suspiciously modern sound—and in spite of one or two good old things like the Parker Homestead and one little, old, long yellow house, has little of interest to commend it except the Village Smithy,



THE OLD STARKEY PLACE, MAIN STREET, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



No. 27 MAIN STREET, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



THE OLD TOWN HALL ON THE HILL, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



TWO HOUSES ON ESSEX MAIN STREET.

in which the fifth generation of Pratts, a family of seamen and smiths, still follows one of the family callings. The location of the smithy would seem to indicate the importance of this road (or Avenue, as it seems to prefer being called) as the principal connecting link between the river and the high road in days gone by. But although the old Town Hall is well up on the flank of this hill, it is the very oldest part down by the river which means Essex—Essex Main Street, the

t' die"—an opinion he would not wish me to share.

However ardent an advocate of progress one may be in theory, it is in towns like this that one regrets its march. Instead of the old coaches lumbering down to the ferry with all the picturesque accompaniments of a stop and a drop at the Tavern, an occasional copy of the works of Mr. Henry Ford (himself, it will be remembered, an advocate of peace and the supercargo



THE "COLONEL LEWIS" HOUSE, MAIN STREET, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.

street next to it called with blunt simplicity Back Street, Little Point Street, where the Old George Hayden house stands and where, opposite, running down toward the river, are three or four tiny, low, one-story cottages, which, taken together, give a very definite charm and character to the street. One of them was built by Uncle Noah Tucker, and Cap'n Charley Hayden has lived in it for forty-two years; he and his brother George in the street adjoining are the last survivors of the Hayden family. Cap'n Charley declares them to be "t' old and t' ugly

of a peace ship), rattles and coughs, shakes with its peculiar palsy and invades the brooding peace of the waterside. Instead of the old shipping of Revolutionary times, trim motor launches and smart small sailing craft mark the difference between sailing as a pastime and sailing as a life to be lived. But as the shadows grow longer and the reaches of the beautiful river begin to draw to themselves the cobweb texture of the twilight, the ghosts of old ships ride on the rising tide and Essex, dreaming still, comes into her own again. It is only in dreams we find our own.



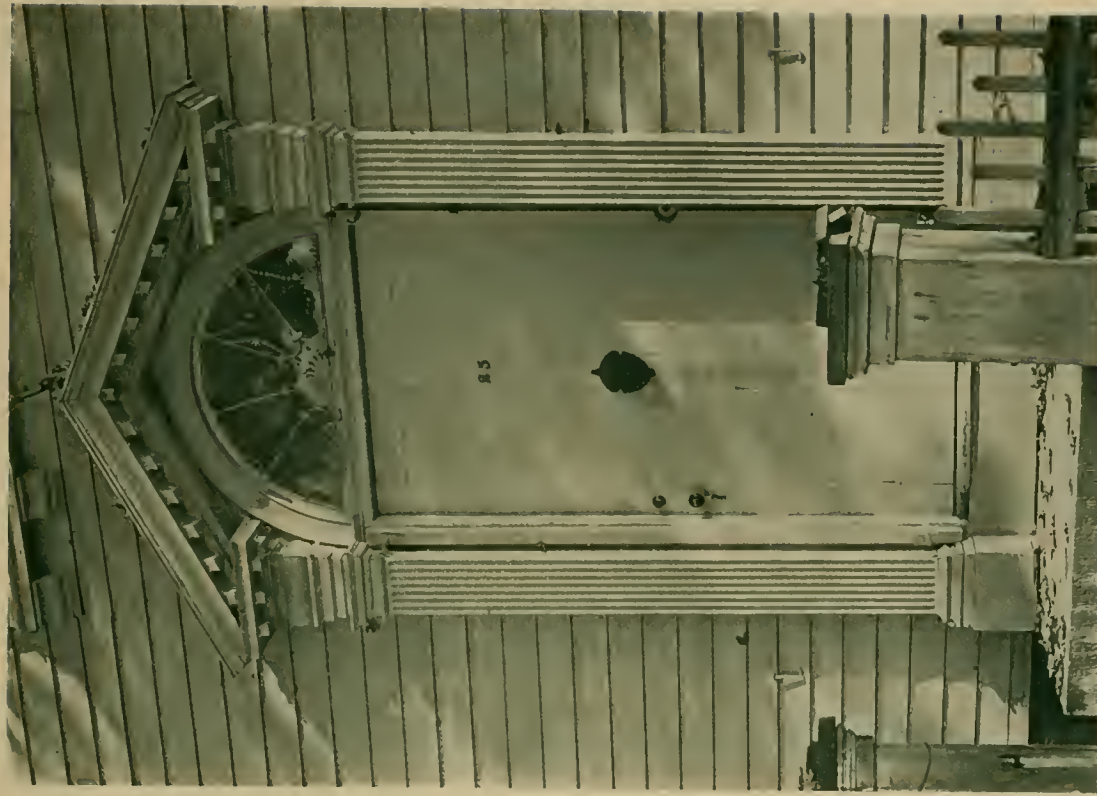
THE OLD STARKEY PLACE, MAIN STREET,
ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



ONE OF THE OLD HOUSES ON LITTLE POINT STREET,
ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



HOUSE OPPOSITE ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.



THE "COLONEL LEWIS" HOUSE.

TWO DOORWAYS ON MAIN STREET, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



THE PRATT HOUSE ON BACK STREET, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.



THE GEORGE HAYDEN HOUSE, LITTLE POINT STREET, ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.

WHITE PINE—AND WHERE TO USE IT

VI—LATH AND DOOR AND WINDOW FRAMING

Preceding articles in this Series have given the detailed specifications for White Pine. This and subsequent articles will discuss the reasons for the superiority of White Pine—and fitness of particular grades—in those uses for which it has been recommended.—EDITOR'S NOTE.*

EMPHASIS has heretofore, quite naturally, been placed upon White Pine as an exterior finish wood, for it is in this connection that White Pine has its greatest usefulness for the architect and its greatest economy for the owner. The architect knows that his most delicate profile can be executed in White Pine, that the mitres will hold and that he will have a cabinet-like job decades after the house is completed.

We have always conceded that cheaper woods may answer the purpose for framing and interior trim. There are, however, two exceptions where the exacting requirements of sound construction call for the same qualities which make White Pine superior as an outside finish wood. They are—lath and the framing members for door and window openings.

What greater disappointment to the architect than walls and ceilings which crack or stain almost before the house is occupied; what greater

annoyance than the constant complaints on the part of the owner that doors and windows will not function properly?

Lath is to-day manufactured from so many different species of wood that it is important for the architect to bear in mind the qualities demanded of a wood for this purpose. The first requisite of a wood for lathing purposes, whether for stucco or plaster, is that it shall be of a uniform texture, which permits the absorption and giving off of moisture without warping, buckling, or changing its shape.

A wood which, in addition, lays easily and does not stain the plaster makes a perfect lathing wood. Years of experience, under all sorts of conditions, have proved White Pine is such a wood.

Other woods are, in certain localities, used for lath, each, however, requiring some special care in laying or some special treatment before being put in place. Lath made from Douglas Fir, for instance, are very generally used throughout a large territory, and with apparently satisfactory results, provided the staining of the plaster is not

* Volume IV, Number 5, October, 1918; Volume IV, Number 6, December, 1918; Volume V, Number 1, February, 1919; Volume V, Number 5, October, 1919; and Volume VI, Number 5, October, 1920.

considered a shortcoming. They must, however, be thoroughly wet-down before being applied. The wetting-down process provides a more gradual giving off of moisture with a consequent better setting of the plaster, and a decided lessening in the tendency of the wood to buckle, as a result of the slower drying.

White Pine Lath alone give uniformly satisfactory results and offer the best insurance against cracking and staining.

In this discussion it is taken for granted that studs are placed according to approved practice and that the lath are applied with staggered joints.

In specifying White Pine Lath, there is just one precaution that the architect should observe, and that is to make sure that his specifications read "No. 1 White Pine Lath," because there are, in addition to No. 1 pure White Pine Lath and lath of various other single species, both a No. 1 and a No. 2 Mixed Lath manufactured by White Pine Mills.

These Mixed Lath, while perhaps good enough for relatively cheap construction, are not satisfactory for first-class work. Each bundle of Mixed Lath is made up of White Pine, Norway Pine, and perhaps several other species not alike in their properties of absorbing and giving off moisture uniformly. White Pine Lath are available in large commercial quantities and can be secured through the usual retail channels merely by specifying and insisting upon "No. 1 White Pine Lath."

It should be observed, too, in this connection that a specification which reads only "No. 1 Lath" is not sufficient, but admits of lath of any single species or of a mixture of species.

There are various patterns of patent sheathing lath on the market in both White Pine and other woods, which, while used to a large extent for some classes of construction, cannot be recommended for first-class interior work.

The other exception for which White Pine claims consideration in the better class of construction is for the framing members in door and window openings. We mention this particularly because, while White Pine offers every necessary quality for the framing of a building, its cost for this purpose may be considered prohibitive. It is poor economy, however, not to use White Pine for the framing members in door and window openings, where the ability of White Pine to "stay put" overcomes the usual exasperating door and window troubles.

Very frequently the binding of windows and the sticking of doors are charged to the swelling or shrinking of frames, whereas, in reality, these difficulties may be due to the warping of the lumber used in framing the openings. Refitting can only overcome the difficulty temporarily. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

"No. 1 White Pine Dimension" is the grade to specify.



THE OLD PARKER HOMESTEAD ON WEST AVENUE,
ESSEX, CONNECTICUT.

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